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Capt. James H. Dawes to the Rescue

On July 3rd, 4th and 5th, the picturesque and historic town of Duxbury, located forty five miles from Boston and ten miles from Plymouth will celebrate its three hundredth birthday. Whereas Plymouth is famous throughout the United States as the place where the pilgrims landed, Duxbury was the cradle of American shipping. The keynote of the celebration will be the glorifying of those stern old salt water dogs, the Duxbury captains who sailed the seven seas, and of the great shipbuilders of the early days who chose Duxbury for the location of their shipyards.

The Duxbury Tercentenary Committee has been digging into Duxbury's history and has uncovered many romantic tales of the past old days. One has to do with a series of rescues by Captain James H. Dawes. It was recounted ^{in part} ~~in~~ an old book published in 1889 by Little, Brown & Company, ^{over out of print} ~~entitled~~ Notes ~~and~~ on Some Wrecks and Rescues, by Robert Bennet Forbes. Here is the story of a gallant captain of the old school, Captain James H. Dawes, of Duxbury, skipper of the "Belize" of Kingston.

The new ship "Mameluke, of 1,000 tons, sailed from New York in August, 1847, bound for Liverpool. She had on board, all told, sixty four persons. Among the passengers were two ladies. Shortly after leaving port she was overtaken by a southwest hurricane; and as her rigging was slack, she was kept before the wind under close-reefed topsails and reefed foresail. The gale increasing, the fore and mizzen topsails were taken in; but hardly had they been furled when the ship broached-to, a tremendous sea broke on board, threw the ship nearly on her beam ends, swept away her deck-house and forty-two persons, broke the mizzen-mast half way up and the mainmast just below the top. The hatches burst open, the water rushed between decks, and in a very short time she became waterlogged. She had a full poop deck, and on this the survivors, twenty two in number, sought shelter. The sea rolled over her waist and tore away the wreck on the broken spars and sails and smashed the boats. Most of the water and provisions were submerged,

and only such scraps as could be fished from the cabin were left for the people to eat.

The first night was dreadful. The tempest howled with unabated violence, and the waves frequently rolled over the poop; so that the people had to make themselves fast to keep from being washed away. During the next day and the day following several vessels passed, and some changed their course as if they had not seen them. One approached so near that a man was seen on her quarter-deck surveying them through a spy-glass, but she too "passed by on the other side." At last a small brig crossed her stern; and the captain hailed them and told them to be of good cheer, for he would lie by them while he had a stick standing. She was under a close-reefed fore topsail and close reefed fore and aft mainsail, and rounded to under the lee of the wreck. The sea was too rough for any boat to live. At the end of twenty four hours the gale moderated, but the sea was still very rough; yet the brig hove to and hoisted out her only boat. It was manned by the mate and three seamen, leaving only three persons on board. The two ladies and two men were first rescued, and when the ladies reached the brig they fainted from sheer exhaustion. The boat could not take more than five persons at a time in addition to her crew, and consequently had to make six trips before all were rescued. The Captain was the last to leave the wreck, which shortly afterwards must have gone down, for it was not seen again.

The rescuing brig was the "Belize", of Kingston, Massachusetts, commanded by Captain James H. Dawes, bound from Boston for Port-au-Prince. She encountered the same gale which wrecked the "Mameluke," and had to throw her deck-load overboard to ease her.

As his vessel was very small, and the people saved were much exhausted, Captain Dawes decided to put into New York, the nearest port. He and his mate surrendered their berths to the ladies and bunked out on the lockers; most of the rescued men had to remain on deck, although the sailors gave up the forecastle to those whom were suffering from exhaustion. All that the captain, his mate and crew could do was done to make the poor shipwrecked people comfortable; and they had the pleasure of landing them in New York. The brig performed her voyage to Port-au-Prince, but upon her return to Boston the party who had chartered her refused to pay the charter because she had deviated from her course. In vain Captain Dawes showed that most of the people he had saved would have died from exposure had he attempted to take them to the West Indies; the charterer was unrelenting; he had "the law on his side." Captain Dawes sailed the brig on shares. He ^{sued} used the

charterer, who employed Rufus Choate to defend the suit. In the meantime the Boston "Post" exposed the story. Mr. Choate told his client that he must have the case settled by arbitration, for though he had the law on his side, humanity was against him, and no jury could be found to decide in his favor. As it ~~was~~ ^{turned out} the arbitrators were confined to the money question only, and they stripped Captain Dawes of all he possessed. His humanity cost him between two and three thousand dollars.

After such an experience one would naturally suppose that Captain Dawes, would, like many others, find it convenient to see as little of wrecks as possible. To his lasting honor be it recorded that hardly had he been again in command before he saw a brig in distress and ran out of his way to give her relief. It was the brig, "Ciudad Bolivar" in sinking condition. The weather was boisterous; and at great risk he took off all hands, twelve in number, and landed them safely in the West Indies. He incurred the risk of saving them at the expense of feeding them afterwards, for he sailed his vessel on shares, as he had done the "Belize." His owner did not lose a cent. Subsequently while in command of the ship, "Matchless," of Boston, of which he was part owner, he fell in with the ship, "Japan," of Bath off Cape Horn, bound from Cardiff for San Francisco. He ran off his course, and when he reached her, found she was on fire and could not be saved. Captain Dawes rounded to; and though a heavy swell was running, he rescued all hands, twenty-five in number, and carried twenty of them to San Francisco. He spoke an English bark which agreed to take five aboard, and he supplied her with water and provisions for their use.

While others have been applauded and rewarded properly, Captain Dawes lost more than three thousand dollars for his humanity. His father and two brothers were shipmasters and all had rescued men from wrecks, of which no note was taken. Captain Dawes after his sailing days were over settled down in Duxbury respected by all who knew him. He was still alive when Robert Forbe wrote his notes on wrecks and rescues, and the author's closing lines were: "The party who
(Capt. Dawes)
fleeced him/boasted that he made \$500 clezr by the operation, but he has been many years in his grave."

Next week we will tell another story of the old days dug from the past by the Duxbury Tercentenary Committee.